

Lesson 1: The House of God (The Church — its spiritual and natural dimensions)

"I will build My Church"

Matthew 16:15-19

15 He said to them, "But you, who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because neither flesh nor blood has revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The truth that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah, God's anointed), the Son of the living God, was given by revelation. The Lord Jesus said that He will build His Church on this revelation (the rock) of who He truly is.

Jesus said, "I will build My Church." The Church is God's idea. denominations are the work of men.

Jesus said, "I will build My Church." The Church belongs to Him. No man or denomination can claim ownership of the Church (the people of God).

The 'gates' represent the place where access is controlled. In Old Testament times, gates protected the city. Some city gates were large enough to contain rooms where soldiers guarded the entrance. Also, it was at the gates that leaders sat to resolve disputes, dispense and execute justice for the people. So, when the Lord Jesus uses the term "gates of Hades," this essentially represents the 'centers of power' controlled by the devil and his demons.

Gates are stationary: we move toward the gates; the gates do not come to us. The Church that Jesus builds will be a powerful Church that will advance with strength and overthrow the gates (centers of power) of Hades (demonic powers). Within a local community or a city, we can easily find centers of demonic power: practices, ideas, places, social structures and so on, which are currently energized and dominated by dark powers. The Church must advance against these. The powers of darkness will not be able to stop the advance of the Church that Jesus is building.

The keys represent authority. In Revelation 1:18, the Lord Jesus declares that He has the keys of Hades and of death. The keys of the kingdom of heaven refer to the authority of God's Kingdom. The Church that Jesus is building has the authority of the Kingdom incorporated in it. The correct interpretation of "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" is that we bind on earth what has been declared bound in heaven, and we loose on earth what has been declared loosed in heaven. So, with the Kingdom authority invested in us, we (the Church) enforce on earth what God has determined in heaven.

The meaning of the word "Church"

Church Gr. "ekklesia" ek = out, klesis = a calling, to call

- it was used among the Greeks for an assembly of citizens gathered to discuss state affairs.
- as an "assembly" of Israel, convened for a defined purpose. In its literal sense, the word 'Church' simply refers to an assembly of those who have been called, for a defined purpose.
- Called — a people who respond to a heavenly call
- Called out — a people who have come out from the world
- Called to gather together — a people who go together, not as individuals
- Called to assemble for a defined purpose — a people with a heavenly purpose

The Spiritual Dimensions of the Church

There are several things Scripture reveals about the Church. Consider some aspects of the spiritual dimension of the Church. We will consider several other aspects of the Church in the section on 'God's Project'.

The Church is the Body of Christ

Colossians 1:18,24

18 He is also the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might have the preeminence. 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for His body's sake, which is the Church. Ephesians 1:22,23

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Spiritually, every believer is united to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17). The Holy Spirit has baptized us (immersed or joined) into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Church is the Body of Christ. We are part of Him, united to Him, one with Him.

When someone receives us, they receive Jesus (Matthew 10:40). When someone listens to us, they listen to Him. If they reject us, they reject Him (Luke 10:16). When someone harms us, they harm Christ (Acts 9:5).

Here are some further aspects of what it means to be His Body.

The Church is eternal because Christ, the Head, is eternal.

Because the Church is the Body of Christ and Christ is eternal, the Church is also eternal. We will be His Body forever—part of what He is.

The Church is not a temporary organization but an eternal work of God, destined always to display the abundant grace of God.

Ephesians 2:7 That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The Church is Christ's instrument to accomplish His purposes.

The Body carries out what the Head commands, both in the present age and in the millennium (Daniel 7:18). The Church is an active, dynamic, and operative entity. We must not be passive, lifeless, or dormant on earth. We are here to complete what the Lord Jesus desires to be done on earth. Therefore we must actively listen to what He is saying and then pursue seeing those things accomplished.

Once we hear from Him, we must understand that we have full authorization and the support of Almighty God to carry it out here on earth. Nothing can stop us. God could have used angels or many other things of His creation, but He chose to involve us humans so that we might do His will here on earth, as it is in heaven.

The Church is the full representation of Christ

Ephesians 1:23 Which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:23 (The Message) See, the Church is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, through which He speaks and acts, with which He fills everything with His presence.

Ephesians 1:23 (AMPC) Which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all [for in that body dwells the fullness of Him who makes all complete and who fills everything everywhere with Himself].

The Church is Christ's completeness. The full measure of Christ is manifested through the Church. Through the Church, the Lord Jesus is represented here on earth. He speaks and acts through the Church. Every part of the Body is full of His fullness. Christ fills every member with Himself. Each of us, being part of the Body, reveals Jesus to the world.

Every believer is a member of the Body of Christ — the eternal Church

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Every believer is a part of the Body of Christ — the Church. We have been introduced into the Body of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit, who baptized (immersed, joined) us into one Body (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Part of the Church is in heaven and part of it is on earth

Ephesians 3:14-15 14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

Believers who have died and gone to be with the Lord are still part of the Church — the family of God in heaven. We who are here form the Church — the family of God here on earth.

The Natural Dimensions of the Church

1 Timothy 3:14,15 14 These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

The apostle Paul is writing to Timothy, who is responsible for the church in Ephesus. Referring to the local community of believers in Ephesus, Paul uses the same terminology applied to the spiritual Body of Christ. He calls the local church the "house of God" and the "church of the living God." The local church is the natural expression of the spiritual Church.

The local church is called "the house of God."

The term "family of God" or "family of faith" is used for both the local church and the spiritual Church, as we see in Ephesians 2:19 and also in Galatians 6:10.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The term house or family refers to a family. We will speak more about this when we explore the local church as the family of God in the section on 'God's Project'.

The local church is called "the church of the living God."

Both the spiritual Body of Christ and the local church are referred to as the Church of the living God. Many things said about the spiritual Church apply directly to the local church.

The local church is the physical expression of the spiritual Body of Christ in a given geographic area.

We can therefore say with confidence that the local church is a physical expression of the spiritual Body of Christ in a specific area. I am certain that when the Lord Jesus looks at a certain region, He does not look at or pay attention to our denominations, name tags, and other things we use to identify ourselves here on earth. He sees all of us who are washed in His blood as His people. As the Lord sees us, in a city (or region), there is one Church — the city Church, composed of all believers coming from all local churches. Serving the Church in the city (or region) are many local churches, ministers, and ministries. God assigns to each of us our specific roles, callings, and spheres of influence. We are part of what God wants to accomplish in His Church and through it in the city. Every local church and those who belong to it have their respective function within and toward the city church.

The local church in a given area is composed of members of the eternal Church.

The local church is made up of believers who all belong to the spiritual Body of Christ, the eternal Church.

The local church in a given area is Christ's instrument in that area to accomplish Christ's purposes.

As stated concerning the spiritual Body, the local church in a certain area, region, or city is Christ's instrument to fulfill His purposes for that region and beyond. We become His hands, His feet, and His voice in that region. Therefore every local church should see itself as engaged in a heavenly mission. We have a responsibility to God and to our community and beyond to do what Jesus wants done.

The local church in a given area is Christ's representation of Himself in that place.

People in a region or area should be able to look at the local community of believers, the local church, and see Jesus. As His Body, we are the expression of Christ to them. We are channels of His love and blessing to the people around us.

The local church in a place is the family of God in that place.

The local church is the place where we live together as sons and daughters of God, as the family of God. It is in the local community of believers, however small or large, that we build meaningful relationships, serve one another, care for one another, and nurture one another toward conformity to Christ.

Why you should be part of a local Church

Although it is true that a believer could be part of any local church, we must also understand the importance of being committed to a local church.

It is within a local church that you and I live out in daily life our membership in the spiritual Body of Christ — the Church. It is one thing to belong to a spiritual Body, where to each of us, as individuals, a place, a function, a calling, an anointing and gifts have been assigned, but we must live all of this in the natural world so that it has value.

The local church is a microcosm within which we practically and effectively live the place and function the Lord has given us in His Body. As the Lord establishes, some of us may be assigned a role that extends to many local churches and perhaps even regionally, nationally, or globally.

Parts of the body do not float around, but remain together. The local church (for example, the church of Corinth) is compared to the human body. Every believer is like a part of the body. If we use this analogy to draw some practical thoughts, one very obvious inference is that body parts do not float. They are 'fixed,' that is 'committed' in a physical body. Yes, we understand that in some particular situations body parts may be transplanted. But the norm is that body parts do not float. Similarly, it is biblical to emphasize that believers need to be committed to a local body of believers, small or large.

Many things in Christian life happen in the context of community — being together, growing together and working together. Just as in the human body every part needs the others for the overall survival and growth of the body, so in the local church we need one another if we want us all to grow.

mature, develop and be fruitful for the Kingdom of God. Our primary dependence is on the Lord Himself. Also, He has established that we must provide strength and nourishment to each other. Character develops as we refine one another. Maturity comes as we learn from one another. Our path toward the calling of our life does not happen in isolation, but as others help us enter it. New wine is found in the cluster (Isaiah 65:8). A single grape produces a little juice. But when a cluster is pressed together, we get more wine. God's anointing and commanded blessing manifest among a community of people, brothers dwelling in unity (Psalm 133:1-3). We need to be planted if we want to prosper. "He who is planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God" (Psalm 92:13).